

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1953

Volume XIV, Number 5

Rachel W. Coffin, Editor

Week of February 23, 1953

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Picnic"

The New York Times

February 20, 1953

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Having one good play to his credit, William Inge now has another, "Picnic," put on at the Music Box last evening. And memorable though "Come Back, Little Sheba" was three seasons ago, "Picnic" is a notable improvement. Taking a group of commonplace people in a small Kansas town on a hot Labor Day just before school opens, Mr. Inge has made a rich and fundamental play out of them that is tremendously moving in the last act. In the first act they look commonplace, but they are people of strength and valor by the time Mr. Inge has finished dramatizing them.

Everything is drowsily casual when the curtain goes up on a sun-baked yard shared by two families that have no men in them. Mrs. Owens, the neighbor on the left, has two growing daughters and she hopes to marry the prettiest of them to the richest boy in town. But a braggart vagrant with a

huge, lanky body strolls into the yard, and Mr. Inge's play begins to come into focus. All the women begin to take a new lease on life.

Since Mr. Inge can write comedy as well as drama, the first stirrings among the girls and women are amusing. But "Picnic" is a deadly serious play. Before it is over, the vagrant with the loud mouth and the unsavory past has altered the whole landscape. What- ever was unreal in the first scene is brutally real in the last act. Forces get loose that no one will ever again put under control.

Mr. Inge knows his characters so well that you cannot distinguish them from the drama. Everything seems to progress under its own momentum once the characters are defined and the situation created. For Mr. Inge seems to have no personal point of view, but only a knowledge of people and an instinct for the truth of the world they live in. Given a wayward brute who has a certain sincerity of his own, and a filmly world of lazy illusions blows apart. The women who are first amused and then titillated look around them in astonishment and terror at the end.

Beautiful as the writing is, the direction and acting are beautiful also. Although Joshua Logan has

staged more spectacular performances, he has never staged one so fine. Working like an associated artist he has helped sketch the environment with grace and good humor. When the mood gets serious he stages the climax powerfully without losing the sunny mood of the opening scenes. Jo Mielziner in his most imaginative form has designed a shabby, heat-drenched small town yard that has an artistic vitality of its own.

The acting is superb. As the cheap braggart, Ralph Meeker acts from the inside out, never forgetting that the character has a validity of its own. Janice Rule gives a lovely performance as the beautiful maiden whose mind is unclear but whose instincts are sound and courageous. As a tom-boy with brains and artistic gifts, Kim Stanley gives a penetrating performance that conveys the distinction as well as the gaucheries of a disarming young lady.

Peggy Conklin as an anxious mother, Eileen Heckart as a school teacher with a hunger for life and a knack for getting it. Paul Newman as a college lad infatuated with a pretty face, Ruth McDewitt as a wistful neighbor, Arthur O'Connell as a comically reluctant

"PICNIC"

Play by William Inge; staged by Joshua Logan; setting by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Mildred Trebor; presented by the Theatre Guild and Mr. Logan at the Music Box Theatre, February 19, 1953.

The cast:
Helen Potts.....Ruth McDewitt
Hal Carter.....Ralph Meeker
Millie Owens.....Kim Stanley
Bomber.....Morris Miller
Madge Owens.....Janice Rule
Flo Owens.....Peggy Conklin
Rosemary Sidney.....Eileen Heckart
Alan Seymour.....Paul Newman
Irma Kronkite.....Reta Shaw
Christine Schoenwalder.....

Elizabeth Wilson
Howard Bevans.....
Arthur O'Connell

bridegroom—help to bring to life all the cross-currents of Mr. Inge's sensitive writing.

The promise of "Come Back, Little Sheba" is abundantly fulfilled. "Picnic" is an original, honest play with an awareness of people. Most of the characters in "Picnic" do not know what is happening to them. But Mr. Inge does, for he is an artist.

Journal American

February 20, 1953

A Fine Blend Of Many Talents

By JOHN McCLELLAN

A STUDIOUS and incisive consideration of a quarry of small-town ladies was offered at the Music Box Theatre last night by the Theatre Guild and Joshua Logan. The title: "Picnic"; the author: William Inge; whose last effort was the memorable "Come Back, Little Sheba."

This one doesn't seem to me to pack the bite of the former, yet it is performed and presented with such artistry that it measures up to a highly satisfactory evening. These are characters easily recognizable from anybody's youth, and if the author has not chosen to bring them to grips with any problems of cosmic importance, he can certainly be credited with making them powerfully human.

In "Picnic" he has surveyed the households of two neighbors living in the less-privileged section of a mid-Western town.

Engaging Bum

One dwelling is presided over by the distraught mother of (1) the prettiest girl in town (2) her unattractive though gifted sister and (3) a frustrated school teacher who boards with them. The neigh-

bor is a lovable middle-aged lady who has given up her life to care for her invalid mother.

Into this reasonably rational existence is suddenly projected an engaging bum, a hoodlum who had known the local rich boy briefly in college. In the ensuing episodes he succeeds in nearly breaking the heart of the ugly daughter, in stimulating the school teacher to drive her reluctant boy friend to the altar and, finally, in inspiring the proud beauty to run away with him.

At the close there are even sage philosophical remarks from the mother and her neighbor, all adding up to little more than the fact that the primal urge is here to stay; there is little we can do about it.

Which doesn't sound like greatly stimulating fare until one considers the acting and direction. In the case of each principal concerned, Mr. Logan has made the most of certain obvious physical advantages and his own ingenuity in creating slightly-off-center tableaux.

Hand of Skill

For example, the teacher and her beau play their most cloy-

ing love scene on their knees, facing one another. The athletic bum sells himself first by a dry swan dive from the top step of the porch and closes the deal with a silent scene in which he exhibits his unconscious masculinity in a jive-dance routine. Here we see the imaginative, unwavering hand of a good director.

This would still be unavailing were it not for excellent casting. Ralph Meeker, less skillfully handled elsewhere, emerges now as one of the most thoughtful and convincing music-men hereabouts; as the local beauty queen Janice Rule is not only frighteningly attractive, she also is competent; Kim Stanley, the bright but unwanted, justifies the opinions of those who singled out her performance in "The Chase" last year. Eileen Heckart and Arthur O'Connell are superlative as the eager teacher and her wavering swain.

Jo Mielziner has delivered a convincing backyard set in which the complicated action of the drama has been reduced to one workable scene.

"Picnic" is no great masterpiece, but it succeeds wonderfully well in bringing a small theme to a high level.

New York Post

February 20, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

Mr. Inge's Second Striking Play

When William Inge wrote "Come Back, Little Sheba," he demonstrated that he was a new playwright of exceptional talent and extraordinary potentiality. Now, with "Picnic," his second drama, which the Theatre Guild and Joshua Logan presented at the Music Box last night, Mr. Inge proves conclusively that his admirers were not overestimating him. Excellently acted and sympathetically staged by Mr. Logan, his new work revealed the power, insight, compassion, observation and gift for looking into the human heart that we had all expected in him, and I'll be astonished if it isn't a dramatic hit of vast proportions.

In "Picnic," the dramatist is looking at the impact on a group of assorted small-town women of the unexpected arrival in their midst of a husky and colorful young vagabond of great physical prowess, romantic appeal and inner turmoil. By the time he leaves the next morning, just ahead of the police, he has

seduced one of them, upset the emotional existence of four more, and, while it is considerable of a question if any has been made happier as the result of his visit, there is no doubt that all have had their lives changed and their outlook enlarged as the result of his dynamic and invigorating presence.

The Staging

Mr. Logan has staged the new play with all of his remarkable flair and theatrical knowledge, and I think there is no denying that a large part of the work's effectiveness is due to his skill. I can't help wondering, though, if there aren't one or two charges that could be leveled against his direction. It is my impression

that there are times when he seems so impressed with Mr. Inge's gift for words that he allows him to run on when a bit of editing would have given a tautness and economy that might have been helpful. I suspect, also, that his talent for showmanship occasionally interferes with the play's innate honesty.

These questions, though, can in no way deny the effectiveness of the production or the great emotional impact of Mr. Inge's writing. It is that capacity for looking into the human heart that gives "Picnic" its major claim to distinction. His portrait gallery of women, including notably a troubled mother and her two daughters, one the town beauty and the other gawky and resentful, a school teacher worried about her spinsterhood, and a lonely elderly woman, is depicted with enormous understanding and compassion, so that they are not only striking as theatrical characters but moving and genuine as human beings. The young vagabond, too, is no mere picturesque romantic, but complex, unsure and a bit tortured.

Sadness and Wonder

Indeed, there isn't a figure in his play that Mr. Inge doesn't seem to understand and see into, and this applies to such figures

as the rich young man whose girl is stolen by the visitor, a storekeeper being trapped into matrimony, and two minor schoolteachers, who are technically just comic relief. Here is a dramatist who knows how to set down how people behave and think and talk, who can create the feeling of a small Kansas town, and is able to write dramatic scenes that have vitality, emotional power and heartbreak. There is a true sense of the sadness and wonder of life in this new dramatist.

There isn't a performance in the play that doesn't seem to me just right. Janice Rule, a young actress from Hollywood, as the town beauty, and Kim Stanley as the sister who fears she is unattractive, are particularly good, and Ralph Meeker is completely believable as the vagabond. There is excellent work by Paul Newman as the young man who loses his girl, Arthur O'Connell as the trapped bachelor, Eileen Heckart as the school teacher, Peggy Conklin as the mother, and Ruth McDavitt as the older woman. Jo Mielziner has contributed another of his fine sets. This William Inge knows how to write.

DAILY NEWS

February 20, 1953

Inge's 'Picnic,' Absorbing Comedy, Given an Admirable Performance

By JOHN CHAPMAN

William Inge, of "Come Back, Little Sheba" fame, has written another good play titled "Picnic" and last evening the Theatre Guild and Joshua Logan gave it a top-grade production at the Music Box Theatre.

"Picnic" is an absorbing comedy of sex as sex is admired and practiced in a small town somewhere in Kansas. Again, as in "Sheba," Inge declines to bring his play to a neat conclusion; he sends his audience home with a feeling that somehow, some time, something more is going to happen—which makes the work all the more interesting to me.

The comedy has a wider range than "Sheba" had, is sharper and more pungent. Its principal characters, splendidly played by Ralph Meeker and Janice Rule, are a brawny, footless young girl-chaser

and a girl who is dissatisfied with her life because all anybody ever thinks of her is that she is pretty. She wants to feel real and not like a decoration, and a lusty young hobo is the first one to make her feel so. It is a pitiful little romance, and shabby, too; but Inge has created his characters so well and they are so persuasively acted that they become fascinating.

Humor and Affection

But there are more than two characters in "Picnic"—eight more; and Inge looks upon them all with

understanding, humor and affection. The yard between two grimy houses near the grain elevators and the railroad station is a lively place, and it has been most effectively designed by Jo Mielziner.

Meeker is a big, handsome, boastful and muscle-flexing young man who has done almost everything but has done nothing for very long. He has been to college on a football scholarship and has been the campus hero, but has avoided acquiring education or good manners. He has been a parachute-jumper and a deep-sea diver, and at the moment he has come to one of the two houses to do some odd jobs in exchange for breakfast.

Expertly Acted and Staged

Miss Rule, who lives in the other house, is really a beauty, in per-

son as well as in the play—but her intellectual attainments are only sufficient to keep her clerking at the five-and-ten. Her younger sister, who is homely and jealous, is the one with all the wit and brains. Kim Stanley does a wonderful job as this salty kid sister. Miss Rule's swain is the son of the town's rich man, a nice but characterless lad who looks upon her as the perfect pin-up girl. It's obvious but nevertheless interesting that the beauty and the roughneck are made for each other. The rich lad is well played by Paul Newman.

Inge goes into other emotional problems, too, such as the case of hungry spinster schoolma'am and the shy and careful storekeeper whom she practically kidnaps—two more admirable performances by Eileen Heckart and Arthur O'Connell. Peggy Conklin does an appealing job as the hopeful mother of the two girls, and Ruth McDavitt is amusing as her cross-the-yard neighbor.

Logan has staged "Picnic" with thorough professionalism. When an intelligently observant play is written, is acted by real actors and is directed by a man who knows his stage business, it means good theatre. So add the Music Box to your visiting list.

"Picnic"—continued

Daily Mirror

February 20, 1953

'Picnic' Is a Stirring, Hilarious Click

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The Theatre Guild and Joshua Logan brought another great hit to the Music Box last evening. It's called "Picnic." It's by the William Inge who gave us "Come Back, Little Sheba," and it's a better play than "Sheba" was, for all its characters are well defined and the situations fully developed.

Inge is concerned this time with a muscle boy who steals a small-town beauty away from a more intelligent but less sexy college mate. The successful suit, or had an unhappy home life as a kid, missed being an All-American boy by failing to make his grades and became a swaggering boastful extrovert to cover his

inner feelings.

HE REALLY ISN'T a bad guy.

He means well. He's just all mixed up inside. Somehow, we came away from the Music Box believing that the girl would be happier with him, sharing a precarious existence, than with the rival who offered security.

Though she had looks, her mentality was nothing to boast about.

There's a younger sister, a tomboy with brains and an intuitive appreciation for good art. She is awkward, man-shy and touching. In describing a novel she had read, she says: "It makes you feel warm inside, kind of sad and a little amused at the same time." And that's just what "Picnic" does.

There's also a deeply moving sub-romance between a spinster school-teacher and an admirer who fears matrimony. Inge has managed to integrate this lesser theme into the whole with admirable skill. It is amazing how well rounded and real all the people are in his play.

JOSHUA LOGAN has directed "Picnic" with an apparent and evocative affection.

Ralph Meeker, reclaimed from Hollywood, is wonderful as the garrulous, muddled, brawny rolling-stone, and **Janice Rule**, lovely, sensitive and

sympathetic as the girl who falls for him. **Kim Stanley** is terrific as the adolescent who talks out of the side of her mouth, shuns dresses for blue-jeans and collects Picasso prints.

Eileen Heckart and **Arthur O'Connell**, as the frustrated schoolteacher and her reluctant swain, are tremendously effective. **Paul Newman** is excellent as the boy who tries to help a pal, only to lose his girl to him.

SALUTES ALSO are due **Ruth McDevitt**, **Peggy Conklin**, **Reta Shaw**, **Elizabeth Wilson** and **Morris Miller**.

As we left the Music Box, the first-nighters had risen to their feet to cheer "Picnic" and its superlative company. Their applause was ear-shattering, spontaneous and heart-felt. We shared their enthusiasm for a stirring, tender, hilarious click. It has everything.

W.W. says: No. 1 Smash!

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

February 20, 1953

'Picnic'

By WALTER F. KERR

JOSHUA LOGAN is one of our finest, most emphatic directors of stylized farce. And in the vast frame of musical comedy, where the bold stroke is altogether permissible, he can turn to sentiment with stunning effect. But why he should have been tempted to apply his firm, staccato and rigidly defined style to the fragile summer-sunset mood of William Inge's "Picnic" is a mystery to me.

The Theater Guild's newest offering at the Music Box is a whisper of a play. In the back yard of a small Kansas town four or five lonely women are marking time, wondering if anything will ever happen to change the placid surface of their lives and planning a picnic just to brighten things up.

Into this not unpleasant emotional vacuum comes a brawny young man—broke, willing to do a few chores in exchange for breakfast, and exuding the sort of animal vitality calculated to stir a few fires. Some fires are stirred: a youngster who is beautiful but not very bright falls in love with him; her kid sister, bright but not very beautiful, exchanges slacks for a new blue dress; a spinster school-

teacher gets bitterly drunk, hares it off to the woods with a reluctant local bachelor, and finally succeeds in making him marry her. At the end of the play, the intruder is gone. So are two of the women. The tempo of life resumes.

In illustrating this faintly autumnal, fitfully erupting bit of nostalgia, Mr. Logan has achieved some striking sequences. There is an infectious glow on stage as these wakening women begin to respond to the workings of a summer night. There is shrewd comedy in the deflated return of three old biddies from an afternoon lunch with the girls. And there is magical power in the second-act climax, a dance of romantic cross-purposes. As the boy and girl who are destined for one another begin to move together in ecstatic rhythm, the chagrin, the dismay, the sheer terror of the women who are looking on but who have been left out is agonizing.

But for far too much of the evening what should have been sensitive is made strident. Characters pose, prance, pause and writhe with alarming mathematical efficiency. Every effect is carefully

calculated, planned for the great big boff. The comedy lines are slapped down noisily; the pathos is always conscious of its style. Whether or not the language of the play is poetic enough for its wistful ambitions never comes clear—the beat of the staging is stronger than it is.

And it is surely to be regretted that Mr. Logan has allowed himself to fall into what is rapidly becoming one of our most depressing directorial clichés. Since **Marlon Brando** was last seen in these parts, the male is no longer male unless he is stripped to the waist, covered with sweat, and given to communicating by grunts, stammers, and the practise of spitting through his teeth.

Ralph Meeker, cast as the athlete who cannot help upsetting a staid community, is an obviously able actor. He makes a short scene in which he dreams of having a job that requires him to wear a tie and talk about "enterprises and things" very affecting. He is moving again when he faces up to the fact that he is a bum, and that nothing will ever change for him. But so much of his performance must consist of the familiar strutting, chest-thumping and slack-jawed mumbling now considered indispensable that the feeling of caricature finally sets in.

Even more astonishing is the superimposition of this same "Streetcar" style on **Kim Stanley**,

here seen as the tomboy who has won a scholarship but who can't for the life of her keep from taking the lead in a dance. **Miss Stanley** seems to me one of the most promising young performers on Broadway, and she has a wonderfully lyric moment in "Picnic" as she tries out her wings, to the tune of a banging piano, when no one is around to watch. But her assumption of the nervous-tic mannerisms, the lolling tongue, and the sing-song rhythms cuts across and falsifies the independent vision of her performance; it also makes her seem rather more a cretin than the class intellectual.

Nearly all of the actors have arresting flashes. **Janice Rule** brings a flower-like loveliness to the slightly overwrought role of the girl who is unlucky enough to love the wrong man. **Peggy Conklin's** alert eyes read meaning after meaning into her motherly warnings. **Ruth McDevitt** ambles pleasantly about as a neighbor who doesn't mind taking in strays. **Eileen Heckart** makes her passionate drunkenness terrifying. And **Arthur O'Connell** reveals enormous restraint and insight in his frightened leavetaking of the schoolteacher he is suddenly bound to.

Jo Mielziner's setting—two back porches leaning lazily across a yard—has the precise feeling of gentle melancholy which Mr. Inge's play suggests. The back yard belongs to Kansas. But the performance is hopped-up Broadway.



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

February 20, 1953

Inge Again Vivifies Little People's Souls

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Picnic" is one of those rare plays in our theater literature which draws its roots from American soil. Its moods and its relationships could take place in no other country in the world, so bound is it to our social customs and our ideas of progress. It opened last night at the Music Box.

William Inge, who wrote so expertly in "Come Back, Little Sheba," is again concerned about the important ambitions of little people. In "Picnic" he has extended his canvas so that it de-

picts more individuals than his earlier play did, but he has woven them into a fabric that is rich with temperament and drama, both apparent and beneath the surface.

The play takes place in the joint back yards of two middle-aged, small-town Kansas women, both long since deserted by their husbands. One has an invalid mother, and the other, two maturing daughters, and a boarder who is a spinster school teacher. Into this congested female atmosphere there comes a young man of neither polish nor promise, whose

animal vitality seriously upsets the entire group.

The visitor is a most interesting character, child of parents who ignored him, self-conscious of his failings and his position behind the eight ball.

Assorted Reactions.

The mother is sensitively wary of temptations for her children. One daughter, bored with being only a beauty, sacrifices her chances for a wealthy marriage for the excitement the visitor promises. Her sister, plain but brilliant, finds her balance for the first time through a wayfarer's brief attention. And the spinster is stirred to make an issue out of the dangle of courtship that has brightened her life in a dreary, minor way.

It is a fascinating play, a jigsaw of action that usually conveys more than is literally said. Joshua Logan's direction illuminates the characters with his fantastically sure sense of what is effectively theater.

Expert to a Fault.

Ralph Meeker is perfect casting as the interloper, casual, simple and groping, authoritative only when his physical maleness is as-

serted. Opposite him, as the play progresses, is Janice Rule, equally fine casting, as the pretty daughter. She manages to convey the quiet discontent of the character by the subtlest methods.

If the play has a weakness in production, it is that expertness sometimes detracts from the heart of it. To me, one of the rare deeply touching moments is that when Kim Stanley as the plain, bright girl, suddenly grows up and throws away the stick she was going to beat a teasing boy with.

Peggy Conklin as their mother preserves quite a miraculous balance between the love and concern she feels for her children. Eileen Heckart is more than capable in the bravura role of the spinster who bursts out against the visitor, then loses pride to fight for the life she wants. Ruth McDevitt is delightfully nosy and chirping as the next door neighbor, and Paul Newman does well with the lovely sister's rich suitor. Some of the evening's richest moments are provided by Arthur O'Connell's state of shock, when faced by marriage.

"Maggie"

New York Post

February 19, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

Adding Some Songs to J. M. Barrie

They have made a calm, amiable, faithful and not very exhilarating musical play out of J. M. Barrie's celebrated comedy about an idiot husband and an understanding wife, "What Every Woman Knows," and it was presented at the National Theatre last night under the name of "Maggie."

It is pleasantly played by Keith Andes and an English newcomer named Betty Paul, and I would say that the book by Hugh Thomas and the music and lyrics by William Roy are reasonably workmanlike, but it can hardly be added that the result is a brilliant or exciting show.

I suppose "What Every Woman Knows" and "Maggie," which stems from it with great fidelity, should have a special appeal to bachelors. Based on a firm conviction that successful men, particularly in politics, are stuffy imbeciles, who are virtually dragged to fame by their meek but highly intelligent spouses, it ought to be extremely comforting to those of us unlucky enough to be without wives. For it whispers to us that if we don't get along very well it's only because we lack such aid, while if we do have successes in life we're

single-handed geniuses.

The Wise Wives

Somehow, though, I don't find the legend as delightful as Barrie and several hundred playwrights, who have hit upon the same theme, seem to think it is. I certainly don't mind the fact that the husbands are depicted as such pompous and humorless prigs. The chief trouble is that the sweet and sacrificial wives aren't nearly as enchanting as they are made out to be. There's no doubt that they are sweet and sacrificial all right, and even noble and heroic. But they also tend to be pretty smug and self-satisfied about it, as they smile their gallant, secret smiles, happily content in their private victories.

This, I must add at once, is not to deny the engaging skill

that Miss Paul brings to the role of Maggie Shand, the plain little Scots girl, who puts the wit and eloquence in the Parliamentary speeches of her fatuous husband. On the contrary, it adds to her victory, because she is so agreeably lacking in mock humility. It is a simple, straightforward and genuine characterization that she offers, and her charm is modest and unaffected. She sings attractively, too, and, altogether, she is a pleasant addition to the American theater.

There may be something to the occasionally-expressed belief that our popular musical plays have tended to concentrate too constantly on the dynamic, and that it might be a good thing if they would relax occasionally and go in for peaceful charm. "Maggie" is assuredly a step in that direction, and there is nothing serious to complain about in Mr. Thomas' tasteful narrative, Mr. Roy's placid songs or the few dances that June Graham has staged for it. It merely strikes me that the placidity begins to grow just a little excessive.

Miss Paul, of course, has the important role in "Maggie," but it seems to me that Mr. Andes is remarkably good as the fatuous husband. It is not easy to play a stuffy bore and also make him the hero of a musical comedy, but I think he achieves the feat. Odette Myrtil, who has never been a particular heroine of mine, still isn't as a worldly

"MAGGIE"

Musical play with book by Hugh Thomas; music and lyrics by William Roy; based on Sir James M. Barrie's comedy "What Every Woman Knows"; staged by Michael Gordon; sets and costumes by Raoul Pene duBois; choreography by June Graham; lighting by Peggy Clark; presented by Franklin Gilbert and John Fearnley at the National Theatre, February 18, 1953. The cast:

Alick Wylie...Bramwell Fletcher
James Wylie...James Broderick
David Wylie...Frank Maxwell
Maggie Wylie...Betty Paul
John Shand...Keith Andes
Prof. duBois...Henry Hamilton
Mrs. MacLaughlin...

Jenny Lou Law
Mme. Marston...Odette Myrtil
Sybil Tenterdon...Celia Lipton
Williams...Gene Hollmann
Venables...John Hoyt
John Shand (in Ballet)...Marc Platt
Maggie Wylie (in Ballet)...

Alicia Krug
Sybil Tenterdon (in Ballet)...
Kathryn Lee
Conductor...Paul Jenkins

Frenchwoman, but I liked Celia Lipton, a tall and cooly handsome English girl, as John Shand's temptress, and the dancing of Kathryn Lee. Anyway, "Maggie" is agreeably unpretentious and certainly inoffensive.

"Maggie"—continued

The New York Times

February 19, 1953

'What Every Woman Knows' to Music

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In "Maggie," which opened at the National last evening, Hugh Thomas and William Roy have tried to improve upon Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows." Taking the Barrie comedy as sourcebook, Mr. Thomas has written a libretto on the same plot, and Mr. Roy has written the songs and lyrics.

Since "Maggie" brings us a charming performance by Betty Paul, and since Raoul Pène du Bois has designed a lovely production, everything ought to be thoroughly snug and cozy. But the truth seems to be that it is also very much on the soporific side. Mr. Thomas has nothing to add to the deft sentimentality of the original fable and most of Mr. Roy's music is narrow in scope and desultory in spirit.

Even in the ornate setting of a

musical play, the plot is still ingratiating. Miss Paul, an English girl now making her American debut, gives Maggie the modesty, subtlety and cautious eagerness that Barrie saw in the role. Mr. Andes' John Shand is excellent, also—humorous and insanely ambitious. The stratagem by which Maggie advances his political career without his being aware of her help is disarming and delightful and accounts for several tender scenes in a nostalgic production.

But Mr. Thomas and Mr. Roy have not improved on Barrie. It might be argued, in fact, that they have intruded on an expert piece of writing. For the production is so intricate that it interrupts the story with extraneous dancing. And excepting one amiable song entitled "Smile for Me," the score

seems determined to be thoroughly dour. It is virtually unsingable. Don Walker has not had much success orchestrating it.

"What Every Woman Knows" is a sentimental comedy. "Maggie" seems to be a lover's lament. Although Barrie is elfin, Mr. Thomas and Mr. Roy are ponderous. They have eliminated most of the pleasure from Barrie's wistful romance. "Maggie" has recruited a good cast that includes Bramwell Fletcher, Odette Myrtil, James Broderick, Celia Lipton and several other agreeable performers. As usual, everyone works hard and in the best of spirits.

But they cannot shake the languors out of the book and music. "Maggie" imposes on Barrie's good nature.

Daily Mirror

February 19, 1953

'Maggie' Is a Delightful Musical Comedy

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The new producing firm of Franklin Gilbert and John Fearnley brought a delightful musical called "Maggie" to the National Theatre last evening. Based on J. M. Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows," it has wit and wisdom. Hugh Thomas has done the book with respect for the original.

"What Every Woman Knows" happens to be one of our favorite comedies. When we heard that Gilbert and Fearnley intended to turn it into a song-and-dancer, we were somewhat alarmed. But we shouldn't have been. Our fears were groundless. For librettist Thomas has brought intelligence and taste to the transformation.

HE HAS KEPT to the story line remarkably well, and re-

tained the tone and spirit of it all. There is still a glow to the fable of the bright Scottish lad forced into marriage with a girl he doesn't love, to further his education and subsequent career. He discovers in the end what every woman knows: that it is often the wife who is really responsible for her husband's success.

William Roy has composed a score that is most helpful to

the book. It has several pleasant melodies, which are arranged to highlight the action rather than to stand out as clicks on their own. And the lyrics catch the mood, too. We think you'll be hearing some of the numbers on radio and records.

Betty Paul, a London star, makes an auspicious debut in the title role. She has loads of charm, great warmth and a voice that falls easily on the ears. There were moments when we thought she looked remarkably like our own Shirley Booth, particularly when there was an impish twinkle in her eyes.

KEITH ANDES is perfect as the rugged, dour and determined John Shand, and he has never been in better voice. He manages the transition from the uncouth lad to the polished M.P. most convincingly. He also manages to achieve genuine feeling in a role where this quality must remain beneath the surface.

Odette Myrtil and John Hoyt struggle too obviously, in our opinion, as worldly representa-

tives of diplomacy. Though we are usually on the side of actors, we believe their satiric song and dance, "It's Only Thirty Years," could be eliminated to the advantage of the production.

Bramwell Fletcher, Celia Lipton, James Broderick and Frank Maxwell do justice to other roles.

JUNE GRAHAM has choreographed a couple of ballets for Kathryn Lee, Alicia Krug and Marc Platt, which they step with grace and verve. The first and more elaborate of these is extraneous, but nevertheless pleasant to watch.

Michael Gordon has staged the musical play admirably. We believe that Barrie would have liked his work. Raoul Pène du Bois has designed sets and costumes that at times seem much too smart and chic for what is essentially a homely, simple story.

But it is quibbling to point out these minor flaws. For "Maggie" is musical-play magic. It is heart-warming, literate and entertaining.

DAILY NEWS

February 19, 1953

'Maggie,' a Gentle Musical, Offers Betty Paul as Its Main Attraction

By JOHN CHAPMAN

James Barrie's gentle Scottish comedy, "What Every Woman Knows," has been converted into a handsome and rather prolonged musical titled "Maggie," which had its opening last evening at the National Theatre. There are several nice things about "Maggie," and the nicest of them is the presence of a newcomer from London, Betty Paul, in the title role. Miss Paul is a sweet and gifted young lady

who can act a role as well as sing it—and there are few such.

The Barrie play, set in the time of 1899 to 1906, is about a man named Shand and his wife, Maggie. Maggie's secret—the secret any

woman knows—is the feminine understanding of the weakness of the male. If a gent is allowed to think that he is the only one who is important, he is happy, and a smart woman can do his thinking for him without his knowing it.

Faithful in Its Fashion.

The musical is faithful to Barrie—too faithful, perhaps, for the book of "Maggie" is overlong. Last evening's performance was an unusually ragged one for a profes-

sional Broadway premiere because of difficulties with scenery and lights. The scenery itself and the costumes, by Raoul Pène du Bois, are of a high artistic order. The direction, credited to Michael Gordon, has a nice feeling for the play but not enough sense of pace and event to keep a big musical moving satisfactorily.

The music and lyrics, by William Roy, are intelligent and pleasant, I guess, but nothing particularly memorable. Keith Andes, in the role of John Shand, has a nice number in "He's the Man." Miss Paul, as Mrs. Shand, puts over her numbers, including a song inevitably titled "What Every Woman Knows," because of her own skill and appealing personality. There is one enjoyable ballet, staged by June Graham, in which Kathryn Lee is most attractive. The cast includes Bramwell Fletcher, Celia Lipton, Odette Myrtil and John Hoyt.



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

February 19, 1953

'Maggie' a Betty Paul Triumph

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

If the entire production of "Maggie" had been intended from the start to welcome the charms of Miss Betty Paul to these shores in the title role, it could not have been more appropriate or welcome.

She has the charms required of the James M. Barrie heroine in magical abundance. She sings easily, moves beautifully, and yet is actress enough so you can well imagine her carrying a straight production of the play, "What Every Woman Knows," from which the new musical is derived.

The show is unquestionably at its best when it sticks closest to its source. The opening scene, which seems almost intact from Barrie, and the long sequences

which involve only two or three people at a time, are far and away the most effective sequences. The charm spreads thin when the sets grow big, crowds appear or the well-danced but unimaginative ballets are inserted.

Songs Cued In.

The songs use cues of Barrie lines as springboards. Thus when Maggie asks John Shand if he is serious-minded, he replies, "I never laughed in my life," which becomes a song title then and there. The music is light and gay, tuneful sprinkles of notes in Scottish idioms.

The story is a classic, telling how the men of Maggie's family practically blackmail an ambitious

scholar into marrying her. She loses him to an aristocratic beauty when he is a success in politics, but wins the final round through her wit and her charming indispensability.

Two key scenes are most moving, one when Maggie early tries to make her John smile with no success, and another in the end, when she wins his grin at last.

Zealous Hero.

Keith Andes sustains the difficult solemnity of the erring hero with zealous intent that entirely suits the character. Odette Myrtil plays one of those French women of experience with the lusty shrugs and grins that always win

her applause.

There was a lesser but decided triumph added to Miss Paul's success last night, with the local debut of Celia Lipton, also English, who plays the menace with aplomb, and looks enchanting every minute.

Kathryn Lee and Marc Platt head the dancing with graceful vivacity, and Maggie's family is ably enacted by Bramwell Fletcher, Frank Maxwell and James Broderick. John Hoyt is suavely diplomatic as an old beau of Miss Myrtil.

At Intimate Best.

"Maggie" owes much to Miss Paul, and I hope her career will bloom so she can owe much to it. She is best, as is the show, when it is intimate, not overwhelmed with sweeping staircases whose only function is a doubtful pictorial one.

If the show sometimes seems weighty from a physical point of view, it certainly proved too much for its backstage technicians last night, who shifted and lit it as if they had never before attended a performance.

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune

February 19, 1953

'Maggie'

By WALTER F. KERR

MAGGIE WYLIE is a plain girl who professes not to have any charm—and who, of course, has lots of it. The new show at the National is quite a lot like Maggie—rather plain for a musical, but with just enough elusive and unexpected charm to carry the day.

In writing tunes and lyrics for Sir James M. Barrie's sly and appealing old standby, "What Every Woman Knows," Hugh Thomas and William Roy have developed an almost completely logical "musical play." They have started off with a sound dramatic structure, and they have kept great gobs of it intact. They have been careful about the plausibility of their songs and have set their endearing figures to singing only when there is some genuine emotional need for it. And they have been daring enough—or nearly daring enough—to dispense with all the old-hat song-and-dance paraphernalia: the inexplicable chorus routines, the frantically lavish costuming, the insistence on two or three

dozen splashy and expensive sets. Though these things often have a gayety of their own, Messrs. Thomas and Roy have wanted to do something more straightforward, more integrated, and perhaps more honest.

As it turns out, they are at their very best when they are sticking closest to their convictions. "Maggie" opens on a warm, sturdy, and wholly believable Scottish living-room, with the Wylie family having an evening thimbleful and proposing to pay for young John Shand's education if he will agree, at the end of it, to marry the uncharming Maggie.

As the reluctant Shand and his stubborn but interested fiancée take a first long look at each other, and as they speak their dubious minds in a mettlesome song called "You're Going to Have a Long and Weary Wait," there is a tart and tingling character

reality which gives great richness to the proceedings. Again, as the pompous but very promising young student explains himself in a lyric which begins "I Never Laughed in My Life," the mating of melody, mood and portraiture is perfect. And when, a little later, Maggie sits down beside her conquest and musically begs him to smile just for her, the play, the score, and the lyrics fuse into a thoroughly touching whole.

In capturing this blend of life-like dialogue and lyrical stylization, the authors have been enormously abetted by an importation from England, one Betty Paul. Miss Paul is both a sensitive actress and an adroit musical-comedy performer. She has a wonderfully stubborn jaw, a fetching ferocious lower lip, and a remarkable capacity for shifting from light-hearted irony to affecting pathos. Whether she is skipping about the stage in new-found happiness, dourly knitting as she watches her man drift away from her, or engaging in a bit of barefaced blackmail as she retrieves for herself a ruby pendant meant for another woman, she is an altogether entrancing creature.

"Maggie" is not all of a piece, though, and it intermittently loses both its quality and its unique ap-

peal precisely as it begins to shoot itself full of conventional musical-comedy adrenalin. The so-called "comedy" numbers, allotted to Odette Myrtil as a worldly-wise enchantress of thirty years' experience, are as out of place in the gentle humors of Barrie as they are, in themselves, lyrically lame. ("We were on the Bosphorus in a rowboat, and suddenly there was no boat.") Miss Myrtil gives them the full treatment—arched eyebrows, industrious innuendo, and all—but they persist in dropping "Maggie" a couple of notches below its best level of inspiration. The few excursions into dance add nothing: there is an incredibly foolish improvisation with butterfly-nets in a railway station, and a standard dream ballet in which Marc Platt, Alicia Krug, and Kathryn Lee take over for the principals, work hard, and achieve almost no emotional intensity whatever.

But Keith Andes, as the husband with infinite faith in himself, sings robustly and performs with engaging directness; Bramwell Fletcher, James Broderick and Frank Maxwell make a canny bunch of Scots; and the simple sincerity which illuminates Miss Paul's performance makes an in-and-out musical experiment well worth a visit.

"Maggie"—continued

Journal  American

February 19, 1953

Talented Star In Dour Play

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE reaction of this operative to "Maggie," a new musical based on Sir James M. Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows," is unfortunately dour. Two aspiring lads named Hugh Thomas and William Roy have endeavored to surround the Scottish comedy with songs and dances but, as presented at the National Theatre last night, they succeeded only in destroying the story and hopelessly confusing the proceedings.

This is regrettable since the production offers for the first time here a new British star of obvious talent and attraction, Betty Paul. She makes heroic efforts to sell the songs and lure the customers into some mood of acceptance, but when

the smoke has finally cleared away it all adds up to a slow and purposeless charade.

The central theme fails to come to life, the songs are hauled in by their heels and there is a singular lack of in-

genuity with which the numbers are presented. Seldom has so much effort been dispensed to produce so little.

Less Effective

Barrie's original play told the story of an unattractive Scottish lass who was maneuvered by her family into marriage with a promising local political figure, and the domestic tribulations which ensued before he realized that, after all, he loved her and needed her. It was her canny instinct ("What Every Woman Knows"), that brought about his final enlightenment.

In "Maggie" the Scottish lass is excessively attractive right from scratch, and one is only impatient with the hero for not accepting the fact and hence living happily ever after. The elements of suspense, the slow evolution of the ugly duckling, are missing; there is never the slightest doubt that the final clinch is being delayed only by the songs which must inevitably come between.

Of these, and they are abundant, there were two that seemed

to have some style. I liked "Smile for Me" and "You Become Me"; the others are all pleasant but not distinctive.

Miss Paul, the British import, does her job well and will probably emerge henceforth in happier circumstances. She can sing and act, and she is highly decorative. As the hero Keith Andes makes a game fight, a tough assignment in light of the fact that one of the plot points requires that he never smile until the final curtain.

We all know and love Odette Myrtil, but what can you do with such material?

It is always difficult in these instances to determine where the deficiency of the author ends and that of the producer and director begins. In this case it is doubly doubtful, because it seems to me that none of them has complemented the other. The show lacks plausibility and humor, and nothing in the way of timing and excitement has been substituted.

I'm a-fear'd "Maggie" is not long for this world.

"Misalliance"

Daily  Mirror

February 18, 1953

'Misalliance' Is Real Fun And Splendidly Acted

By ROBERT COLEMAN

We caught a preview of the New York City Drama Company's revival of "Misalliance" at the City Center last evening, and found it gorgeous fun. It proves that Bernard Shaw could dash off cockeyed comedy with the best of them. And could handle ideas with amazing skill at the same time.

"Misalliance" has to do with romance, diplomacy, aristocracy, democracy, business, women's rights and what-have-you. It is filled with delightful talk and amusing situations. Why it hasn't been given more often is a mystery to us. All right, it's minor Shaw. But that's better than most first-rate plays by others of our time.

ALBERT MARKE, new artistic director at the City Center, has assembled an excellent cast,

which performs splendidly under the inspired direction of Cyril Ritchard. Barry Jones, Dorothy Sands, Roddy McDowell, William Redfield, Jan Farrand, Jerome Kilty, Richard Purdy, Tamara Geva and Richard Kiley team smoothly to explode the comedy fireworks.

There is an immensely hilarious episode in which a shop clerk who has read too many thrillers invades the gaudy mansion of an underwear manufacturer, in order to avenge his late mother's honor. Only to meet mayhem at the hands of a woman acrobat and

receive kindness from the simple-minded mistress of the house.

It is played to the hilt by Jones, Kilty and the Misses Sands and Geva. Kiley and Miss Farrand also score in one of the funniest pursuit scenes since Maurice Evans revived "Man and Superman." McDowell and Redfield get the play away to a fast start, and make important contributions throughout.

John Boyt has designed a deliciously weird period set, and Robert Fletcher appropriate costumes.

RITCHARD HAS properly chosen to stage the comedy with tongue in cheek, gusto and sparkle. He has taken what might have been a rather dull play, in less capable hands, and turned it into a wonderful three-ring circus. It just goes to show what a clever and imaginative director can do with a minor work.

We don't think you will find anything as enjoyable as the length of Broadway as the second act of "Misalliance." It is one continuous laugh. It had the previewers howling and holding their sides. And the other cantos boast plenty of

"MISALLIANCE"

Comedy by Bernard Shaw; staged by Cyril Ritchard; setting by John Boyt; costumes by Robert Fletcher; presented by the New York City Drama Company at New York City Center, February 18, 1953. The cast:

Bentley Summerhays.....
Roddy McDowell
Johnny Tarleton.....
William Redfield
Hypatia Tarleton, Jan Farrand
Mrs. Tarleton... Dorothy Sands
Lord Summerhays.....
Richard Purdy
Mr. Tarleton..... Barry Jones
Percival..... Richard Kiley
Lina..... Tamara Geva
Gunner..... Jerome Kilty

yaks, too.

We recommend that you rush to the City Center immediately for tickets, as the engagement is limited to two weeks. We don't think you will want to miss "Misalliance."



New York World-Telegram

The Sun

February 19, 1953

Shaw's 'Misalliance' Played to Hilt of Wit

By WILLIAM HAWKINS

The New York City Drama Co. at the City Center has turned up the most delightful production of its varied history in "Misalliance," a little known Shaw comedy, acted to obtain the full measure of its wit.

The play follows the familiar Shaw pattern of mixing the conventional relations of social classes, the sexes and different generations. The female is the hunter and the truly self-sufficient individual. The wife is most sympa-

thetic toward her husband's extracurricular son. The weakling suitor ends up with the most violent of females.

There are a few wordy stretches, but one rarely notices them, because Cyril Ritchard has directed the play for the vital extraction of every ounce of its fun. It is well acted, too, by players who know how to be emphatic in their speech without losing pace. The set is a wonderful confection on Aubrey Beardsley curves, colorful and architecturally rich with cornices, skylight and solarium.

Vehicle for Fun.

Shaw makes fun of himself by having one character remark that the members of her family "never do anything except discuss whether what other people do is right," and another says, "That's not bad language, it's only Socialism."

The evening's most flavorful performance is Barry Jones' as the self-made tycoon, who loves books and ladies. His rolling walk, his Yorkshire accent, his beaming smile and infectious spirits, all stamp the comedy as a vehicle for fun that is sly and stimulating.

Orange Juggler.

Tamara Geva is spirited as the Polish flyer who juggles oranges while she reads the Bible, and practices jujitsu on her suitors. Dorothy Sands is delicious as the prim mother, and Jan Farrand, and William Redfield are excellent as her children.

Roddy McDowall gives an expert account of the hysterical young aristocrat, and Richard Kiley plays the hunted hero with stalwart taste and assurance.

All in all it is a rich and riotous evening.

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune

February 19, 1953

'Misalliance'

By WALTER F. KERR

Due to the fact that two plays opened last night, Mr. Kerr covered "Misalliance" at a preview Tuesday night.

"MISALLIANCE" really has no subject at all, and it may be the funniest subjectless play I have ever seen. The piece, which is being given brilliant production at City Center, is fairly early Shaw, and it is supposed to be minor Shaw. It was a failure when it was first produced and it has been infrequently revived since. But even minor Shaw has a way of looking masterly nowadays, and the gloss which director Cyril Ritchard and a superbly accomplished company have now put on this willful and wandering conversation-piece makes it an unalloyed joy.

Shaw does start out with a sort of premise, a characteristically inverted and irreverent one: that the sound, money-making middle-classes are beginning to regard marriage into a decadent aristocracy as decidedly beneath them.

There are a few amiable quips to this effect in the first act, and a sort of summary of the new social snobbery in the last.

In between, anything goes. Shaw skylarks off into a disquisition on "escapist" as against "moral" literature, letting the phillistine have himself a field day. He has a few things to say on the subject of prayer ("The common people don't pray, they only beg.") He gives us a foretaste of "Man and Superman" as he throws a determined heroine at the head of a perfect gentleman who wishes to play the game properly. He kicks up his heels over the absurdities of romantic love, especially the business of offering some one a lifetime of devotion. ("Fancy a young man offering his old age as a temptation!")

He brings down the first-act curtain by having an aeroplane crash into the backyard greenhouse, he hurries onto the stage, a dazzling aviatrix who belongs to a family that makes a point

of doing something death-defying every day, he sets this enchantress to arousing what might be described as the seventy-year-itch in the father of a family and a passionate but somewhat purer adoration in every one else on the premises.

The language flashes, the paradoxes tumble happily over one another, the impudence bubbles all night long. At length some one remarks that "This may be a vulgar business habit, but I should like to know where we are," and we begin to have an intimation that a very happy at-home is about to come to an end.

Obviously this kind of engaging improvisation on the thousand themes dearest to Shaw's heart might collapse of its own contrariness if it weren't sustained by a supercharged ensemble. Cyril Ritchard has seen to it that all and sundry partake of the same bland, impertinent, and unquenchably comic airiness. The players are, in fact, so uniformly winning that it is difficult to pick among them.

Richard Kiley is hilariously mannered as the young paragon ("I wish to do nothing incorrect") who turns out to have a very realistic view of the moral and financial amenities. William Redfield is irresistibly funny as one of those pompous, stable, and intoning Britons who are still in the cocoon

stage. Roddy McDowall manages both the Wildean flippantries of the opening scenes, and the tantrums to which this overbred puppy is given, with gleeful enthusiasm.

Barry Jones is capital as a tycoon who meant to indulge his penchant for more intellectual things but who couldn't help making a fortune in underwear, and the foolish gayety of his infatuation with his visitor from the skies is completely contagious. Tamara Geva is the flyer, filled with disgust at a home so saturated with love, and she whips her last-act paean of praise to personal integrity into a resounding climax.

In the role of a humorless young socialist who goes around shooting people on his Saturday afternoons off, Jerome Kilty is delectable. And Jan Farrand's aggressive heroine, Dorothy Sands' solicitous mother, and Richard Purdy's desiccated statesman are all first-rate pieces of work.

The evening is further embellished by a John Boyt period setting which serves as a properly garish and irrational background to the bright nonsense; a veritable Aubrey Beardsley hothouse drowned in scrollwork and adrift in inexplicable butterflies.

"Another talker," sighs Shaw's heroine as she finds her man resisting her. But the talk is exhilarating.

"Misalliance"—continued

Journal of the American

February 19, 1953

Everybody Had A Wonderful Time

By JOHN MCCLAIN

THE old boy can really write—the old boy being George Bernard Shaw and the latest evidence of his eminence being a rather remote comedy called "Misalliance." This was offered by the New York City Drama company the other night as the second in their series of productions for the current season, and everybody on the premises had a good time.

It was reported last year that that Shaw had the highest batting average of any playwright, living or dead, for the theatrical year.

His estate was collecting from a variety of items: "Caesar and Cleopatra," "Don Juan in Hell" and "Saint Joan,"

to name a few that appeared in these parts, not to mention the old stand-bys that were playing simultaneously throughout the semi-civilized world.

Coming away from "Misalliance," something he probably chalked up with his left hand.

one understands why. Here, as an apparent stunt, he has thrown a group of highly incongruous people together in a fantastic English home and by sheer force of wit succeeded in moving them about and making them speak with sufficient charm to produce an hilarious evening.

There is almost no motivation; certainly the most flimsy and implausible plot. But the old guy has a turn of phrase, an incredible talent with type delineation and the facility of juggling them hither and yon with entire lack of purpose but a maximum of amusement. Let us never sell him short!

Here we see, perhaps for the first time, the insipid character in the blazer inquiring, "Who's for tennis?" and a few moments later I was startled to hear somebody say "I've got news for you," exactly as it was being spoken over the cheese-cake at Lindy's, a few blocks away at the same moment. But the timeliness is only superficial; the situations are ageless.

Albert Marre, the new director of the City Center, is to be

largely credited. He has assembled an immaculate cast and given them full rein: a wonderfully ridiculous set by John Boyt and the elaborate trappings of the Edwardian era by Robert Fletcher.

Barry Jones is entirely beguiling as Mr. Tarleton, and he is given the superlative support of Dorothy Sands, as his wife. Then there is William Redfield, his stuffy son, and Roddy McDowall, the daughter's fiancé who is given to throwing unexpected fits on the floor.

And there is Tamara Geva, as a glamorous aviatrix, and Richard Kiley, as her acquisitive fellow-flyer. Not to mention Jerome Kilty, who scores heavily as the product of one of Mr. Tarleton's early indiscretions.

There doesn't seem to be anybody around today who can give us as much fun as old Shaw, and I think this is one time when the proceedings could be profitably moved downtown, for an extended run.

DAILY NEWS

February 18, 1953

Shaw's 'Misalliance' in Genial Performance at the City Center

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The City Center's short drama season, which began very pleasantly with an affable and stylish version of Shakespeare's "Love's Labor's Lost," continues to be affable and

stylish with the production of another seldom-played comedy, Bernard Shaw's "Misalliance." This play, whose official opening is scheduled for tonight, was revealed to a houseful of previewers—including this reviewer—last evening.

Thanks to Shaw, thanks to an attractive cast and thanks to the comic sense of director Cyril Ritchard, "Misalliance" is a generally happy spoof about marriage, morals and the Modern (1909 model) Woman. Shaw was at his chattiest when he wrote it—and

for him, in a genial frame of mind. This geniality comes through at the City Center and makes for an enjoyable evening.

Enchanting Setting.

Shaw plots are—with some exceptions, like "Candida" and "Saint Joan"—beside the point, and the plot of "Misalliance" is one of the besidest. Somehow it mixes a middle-class rich family, an aristocratic poor one, a dashing aviator, an athletic circus lady and

a young man of shockingly illegitimate birth. This gives Shaw plenty of room for jokes and critical observations on wealth, aristocracy, sex and station in life, with particular attention to the growing aggressiveness of the female—and all Shaw ever needed was plenty of room.

"Misalliance" is fun. It has an enchantingly gaudy setting by John Boyt, looking curiously like something Cecil Beaton might have designed for "Madam Butterfly," and within this setting some good comedians perform. Nine of them, to be precise.

An Able Cast.

Barry Jones and Richard Purdy, as the tycoon and the aristocrat,

respectively, play their roles with polish and humor. Jan Farrand is delightful as an oversexed Modern Girl. Tamara Geva is splendid as a Polish acrobat who is strong enough to make her own way in the world and refuses to be patronized or supported by a mere male. Dorothy Sands is amusingly vague and fluttery as a rich man's wife who never quite knows what is going on.

I particularly enjoyed last evening the performance of Roddy McDowall, a former film moppet, as an overbred youth who lies down on the floor and has a tantrum whenever affairs don't suit him. Richard Kiley is pleasantly masculine and assured as that modern daredevil, an aviator, and William Redfield is entertaining as a rich man's son with more muscle than mind. And Jerome Kilty gives a really funny performance as a young man who is confused because he was born out of wedlock.

Since "Misalliance" has not been professionally performed here for 36 years, it can be classed as a novelty. Almost anything of Shaw's is a novelty, anyhow, and I'm glad that the City Center has come up with this one for a two-week stand.

The New York Times

February 19, 1953

Barry Jones Heads a Capital Cast in a New Staging of Shaw's 'Misalliance'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Thanks to the City Center, Shaw's "Misalliance" may now be graded upwards. Most of us have been foolishly assuming that it is one of those facetious conversations that get to be unbearably tedious before a long evening is over. Even Max Beerbohm, never a sober-sides, thought so when it was first produced in 1910. It is a facetious conversation. But in the version that opened at the City Center last evening, it is also vastly entertaining. From the moment the curtain goes up on an amusingly garish setting by John

Boyt, "Misalliance" is sparkling and contrary in the best Shavian style.

Don't expect to discover from this column what Shaw had specifically in mind when he wrote it. Perhaps he was not adamant himself about sticking to a central point. In the early scenes there seems to be some doubt whether a marriage between a tradesman's daughter and the son of a lord is socially suitable.

But that is hardly more than the discharge of the opening gun. For "Misalliance" then starts racing through a whole evening of gay non-sequiturs, which touch in passing on a hundred vigorous ideas about social customs and prejudices. If Shaw wrote it to spite those who said he did not write plays but debates, he can now take a little wry satisfaction as he looks down or up on this angry planet. "Misalliance" is a stream of bright improvisations that contain many odds and ends from Shaw's lexicon of social principles. It is consistently funny. A theatregoer leaves

it under the impression of having had a completely sardonic good time.

Say a particular word of thanks to Cyril Ritchard for having staged a breezy performance that keeps Shaw's tongue in his cheek. The tone is light; the pace is swift; the mood is dry and mocking. Barry Jones, an old hand at Shaw acrobatics, is anchor-man for the performance; there could hardly be a sounder craftsman. Cast as the garrulous, fantastically literate manufacturer of underwear, he has the bounce and gusto and the look of innocence that keep the dialogue spinning. He is the perfect Shavian by reason of the comic insincerity he can bring to a part.

But all the players are either wits or buffoons in this caper and in the order of the program are: Roddy McDowall as a cynical Marchbanks with a clever mind; William Redfield as a pompous chump; Jan Farrand as one of those deadly females who chase apprehensive Shaw heroes; Dor-

othy Sands as a busy, sympathetic mother whose mind is a storehouse of middle-class platitudes; Richard Purdy as a disillusioned man of the world; Richard Kiley as an unimaginative prig; Tamara Geva as a scornful circus acrobat, and Jerome Kilty as a whining, cowardly Socialist.

They talk at high speed with outrageous frankness and impudence until, toward 11 o'clock, Shaw remarks that for the moment he has nothing more to say. Since the talk is brilliantly wayward the performance gives a misleading impression of being full of action. There have been so many Shaw revivals lately that you might expect the theatre to be getting down to the bottom of his barrel. Well, the barrel seems to be lively no matter how far you dip into it. Maybe it's a barrel of what used to be known as "ardent spirits."

Since "Misalliance" and "Margie" opened simultaneously, this review is based on the dress rehearsal of Tuesday evening.

New York Post

February 19, 1953

Shaw's 'Misalliance' A Joy at City Center

By Richard Watts Jr.

That fellow Bernard Shaw could certainly write comedies! The City Center, which, under the imaginative guidance of Albert Marre, is specializing in the lesser-known works of eminent dramatists, last night got around to presenting Shaw's rarely-seen and not-often-appreciated, "Mis-

alliance," and it turned out to be a play of infinite delight. I saw it at a preview performance Tuesday evening, and I am happy to report that, in its superbly garrulous fashion, it is a continuous joy, a Shavian grab-bag of hilarious gaiety and wisdom, and that it is splendidly acted in a production of style and relish. To put it briefly, it's a theatrical treat.

There is no reason to deny that it is a stage conversation piece which is never satisfied with one

word when seven or eight will do, and that it runs on and on with frolicsome abandon. That, indeed, is one of its glories. It sets down a motley group of assorted characters—I say, "characters" advisedly—and lets them talk to their heart's content, and, if you are bent on such academic things, you can find themes in it from "Man and Superman," "Heartbreak House" and, I suppose, half a dozen other Shavian plays, including even "The Mil-

lionaire." What is wonderful about it is that the wit, humor and vitality are inexhaustible.

Could it be that "Misalliance," which was first produced in 1910, is the first play in which an athletic youth, armed with a racket and a blazer, rushes on stage and says, approximately, "Anyone for tennis?" If so, the immortal line has never since been so happily employed. But, then, it is my impression that everything is happy about this virtually plotless comedy, in which all sorts of people show up at the Surrey country house of a romantic and philosophical manufacturer named Tarterton, including a female Polish acrobat, a British proconsul from the East, a young man bent on avenging his mother, a pursued male and a pursuing female, all talking like Bernard Shaw.

Lack of Orthodoxy

After seeing "Misalliance" produced with gay and colorful setting and costumes by John Boyt and Robert Fletcher, respectively, and with good actors, who play with spirit and understanding, I wonder why it has achieved so little popularity and regard, even among Shaw en-

thusiasts. Probably it is because, even for so unorthodox a dramatist, it is a play with exceptional lack of concern for narrative, emotion or consistency of theme. But such technical matters seem furiously unimportant in the face of the sense, gaiety, comic invention, charm, vigor, high spirits and graceful exuberance of style that constantly enliven it.

That splendid British actor, Barry Jones, provides one of the most delightful and engaging characterizations of the year as the amiably philandering manufacturer. But "Misalliance" is filled with attractive performances. Roddy McDowall as a young aristocrat given to tantrums, Richard Kiley as the pursued male, Jerome Kilty as the ineffectual avenger and Tamara Geva as the Polish lady are particularly good, but so are Dorothy

Sands as the manufacturer's anxious wife, Richard Purdy as the proconsul, William Redfield as the youth with the tennis racket, and, to a lesser extent, Jan Farrand as the pursuing female. And Cyril Ritchard's staging has helped make "Misalliance" the rare fun-it is.

"John Brown's Body"



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

February 16, 1953

John Brown' Grips Imagination

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"John Brown's Body," Stephen Vincent Benet's epic poem, which Charles Laughton has adapted and directed and Paul Gregory presents at the Century, is a worthy, distinguished successor to "Don Juan in Hell."

Mr. Laughton constantly emphasizes respect for the spoken word. This work is staged so nothing interferes with the poet's phrases, in their primary function of inciting you, the listener, to create image after image of your own.

Without the novelty "Don Juan" had, the new work is a distinct extension of the same enterprising method. The Shaw was a poetic presentment of a play. This is the theatrical tender of a poem. It is proposed by Tyrone Power, Judith Anderson and Raymond Massey.

Put Before the Eyes.

With poetry, music and actor at their most magical, you are en-

thralled. When, for instance, Miss Anderson completes the passage about the burning mansion, it is an effort to admit no such house or fire was there before your eyes.

The poem spans the Civil War, surging with historic crises, and relating intimate tales of combatants' ruptured lives. There is a Rebel romance and a Union romance, whole families recur, and passing figures are glimpsed. Then there are the giants, Lincoln and Lee and the other generals.

The stage is imaginatively simple, its stark detail picked out in scarlet lines. On one side are bleachers for the singing chorus, which never appears in full light. Three microphones are down stage, in front of a red-topped railing.

The three stars move in and out of the floodlit area around the mikes. They rest against the rail, pass behind it, or progress from

one phone to another. At one great climax, Mr. Power treats the rail as a ridge of land to give physical scope to his stirring description of a battle.

Applause rarely breaks the poem. At the close of a long passage about Lincoln, Mr. Massey got a big inevitable hand at the premiere, though the scene is scarcely more moving or ingeniously acted than the one in which he makes the aloof Lee a man of warm marble.

The premiere, exciting enough, was by no means the smoothest or hottest show the troupe has given or will give. Premiere exigencies only honed the keen performance of Walter Schumann's brilliant illustrative music, which backs the poem, or takes it over in chorales.

Dramatic Chills.

The night's dramatic chills, warmth and penetration are most

"JOHN BROWN'S BODY"

Adapted and staged by Charles Laughton from Stephen Vincent Benet's poem of the same name; music and effects by Walter Schumann; on stage choral director Richard White; presented by Paul Gregory at the Century Theatre, February 14, 1953, and starring Tyrone Power, Judith Anderson, Raymond Massey and a chorus of twenty.

often Miss Anderson's. With tender beauty, and incomparable plastic and vocal range she makes pure experience of the girl's love affair and motherhood, and the iron fragility of the Southern lady.

Mr. Power has relaxed solemnity, intensity and the dynamic excitement for widely varied effects. He realizes a sensuous spell in the dreamy description of the hot Georgia countryside, and later makes the battle explode.

Mr. Massey's quiet, polished perfection allows contrasts as strong as that between clabber and sorghum. His slack-jawed house slave, and the mighty, humble Lincoln are opposite poles of the actor's art.

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune
February 16, 1953

'John Brown's Body'

By WALTER F. KERR

Charles Laughton's genius for putting the theater to unorthodox uses has brought him another stunning success. It was Mr. Laughton, working with producer Paul Gregory, who conceived and directed last season's eye-opener, "Don Juan in Hell." This time he has moved away from the drama proper, taken up Stephen Vincent Benet's epic poem, "John Brown's Body," and filled the reaches of the Century with its rolling rhythms.

In the nature of things, this new experiment cannot have the electrifying tension of Shaw's exhilarating debate. It is largely narrative, rather than dialogue meant to strike vocal fire; it is a vast panorama made of fragmentary pieces; it has no natural theatrical climaxes.

Yet adapter Laughton—with the energetic assistance of Tyrone Power, Judith Anderson, Raymond Massey and a beautifully trained choir of twenty voices—has infused it with a whole landscape of lively stage images. The principals have only three micro-

phones, a few occasional chairs, and a single evocative balustrade to work with. But Lincoln pacing his retreat at Soldiers' Home, battling it out with his puzzling God, and falling to his knees in anguish becomes a graphic and moving reality. So does a proud and spirited Southern hostess as she watches a cherished way of life turn to dust at her feet. A looting member of Sherman's army, shouting his way through the echoing halls of a deserted mansion, is far more vividly realized than he might have been had the scenic warehouses been ransacked for literal props.

Better still, Laughton and effects-master Walter Schumann have generated astonishing momentum with their choral orchestration. They have found illustrative color everywhere: in the cacophony of a parade, in the musical flight of giggling debutantes at a house party, in the eerie overtones of an exhausted soldier's nightmare. And they have gone beyond simple illustration into exciting antipathetic clash. As the principals lament the failure of armies to

arise ("Nothing is changed, John Brown") the chorus begins to beat out, and build to a hushed crescendo, the assertive strains of the Battle Hymn. The ray instrumentation of a Southern ball is set against the principals' disturbed intuition that "This is the last." The hooting charge of the Southern armies at Gettysburg offers tingling contrast to the muted, tense, last-minute reflections of a Northern rifleman.

Over and above these melodic duels, the trio of stars create a gallery of defined and moving characters. If Tyrone Power has the most congenial assignments, he also makes the most of them. Mr. Power is simultaneously cast as the Northern recruit, Jack Elliyat, and the rebel aristocrat, Clay Wingate—parts which require of him no more than his normal range. But he displays a surprising theatrical presence, an alert and kinetic responsiveness to the moods of the Benet poem. He seizes upon a physical sensation—a prod in the back from an enemy guard, the sight of a dead cat on the road back from Bull Run—and gives it acute and compelling intensity. When he looks at a night sky, the sky is there; when he stares out at onrushing lines of gray, you share his apprehension.

Judith Anderson carries long sections of the narrative with magnificent variety. She has been given the evening's most frag-

mentary roles, but she outlines a defiant Northern mother who has dared to pray for John Brown with swift precision; she sketches in the somewhat truncated story of Sally Dupre with angry fire, and her dimensional portrait of the Yankee-hating, God-admonishing Mary Lou Wingate is a memorable blend of irony and understating.

Raymond Massey brings clarity and simplicity to Benet's affecting speculation on the mystery of Lee, and he is—to the surprise of no one at this late date—a deeply touching Lincoln.

Not all of the devices which an ingenious director and inventive company have lavished on "John Brown's Body" are wholly successful. There are, it must be confessed, self-conscious moments. The opening postures are so severely formalized as to suggest a peculiarly rigid graduation exercise. Some of the hand-props—notably an old family album—are awkwardly introduced and distractingly dwelt on. The last third of the evening would profit from further cutting. But neither the occasional affectations nor the final overlength do serious damage to an exceptionally interesting lyric adventure.

It is an old and largely forgotten literary notion that epic poetry was meant to be read aloud. "John Brown's Body" is being given a mellow and magical reading at the Century.

"John Brown's Body"—continued

The New York Times

February 16, 1953

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Although Stephen Vincent Benét wrote "John Brown's Body" for readers, it is a piece of vivid theatre now. For the reading that Judith Anderson, Raymond Massey and Tyrone Power installed at the Century Saturday evening is a stage performance of fire and beauty. The Benét poem preserves the darkest, most agonizing of the American memories—when two parts of the nation hunted and shot at each other for four bloody years. Charles Laughton's stage adaptation has reduced a long epic to tractable size; and with the accompaniment of a chorus, it brings us words that sing and images that can be acted. Like the "Don Juan in Hell" reading of last season, the "John Brown's Body" production refreshes the whole conception of theatre.

Benét published his epic in 1928.

It won the Pulitzer Prize the next year and is now a part of American lore as fundamental as Whitman. Reared in a family of military traditions, Benét was steeped in the military history of the Civil War. He knew, not only the campaigns, but the personalities and the abilities of the commanders on both sides, as well as the native temperament of the troops.

As a poet he knew more. He knew and loved the fields and woods, the leaves and flowers, the sounds and odors, the textures of the seasons. And to him the Civil War was not an isolated incident, in American history but a wildness in the heart of America—savage and desperate on both sides but also an expression of pride and conviction. In a series of poems written in various forms and running to 377 pages in the original edition, he told the homely story of a terrible ordeal without heroics or sanctimoniousness. Although it fascinated him, it also widened and deepened his fund of compassion.

Presented as a kind of elegant Chautauqua reading, the stage version dispenses with the usual paraphernalia of the theatre. Miss Anderson wears a pastel yellow evening gown. Mr. Massey and

Mr. Power are in evening dress. The men and women of the chorus are also formally attired. But for all its visual austerity, this is a production, and a brilliant one. Behind the microphones there is a balustrade with a red top that serves as a bench where the actors can sit or lounge; and in the shadows on either wing there are red-topped chairs for the chorus or for the actors to retire to when they have a breathing spell.

The performance looks informal. In fact, it is occasionally quite informal; and, if you want to be captious about it, a bit too informal in the first act. Now and then the actors step out of character and affect a personal relation to each other as if they were human beings. Well, they are human beings, of course. But in "John Brown's Body" they are spokesmen for many characters and prophets of destiny—bigger than life, detached from society.

Mr. Laughton's direction is shrewd. It varies pleasantly the task of reciting a long narrative by giving fragments of it to each of the actors, removing them from the playing area at intervals and enriching the performance with evocative choral music. As the evening progresses the tempo

quickens, and the performance rushes toward a dramatic climax. In the second act, it also gives each of the actors at least one highly dramatic scene. They are wonderful actors. In the theatre we are happily familiar with Miss Anderson's depth and range and Mr. Massey's spiritual exaltation. Both of them have scenes that are tremendously moving—brief but penetrating and passionate.

Theatregoers in New York are less familiar with Mr. Power's capacity for acting in person on the stage. Let it be said at once that he is worthy of the company he keeps. For he, too, acts with candor, skill and understanding; and he can play a big scene with the authority of an actor who has mastered it selflessly. The ballads and spirituals, composed by Walter Schumann, bring a touch of musical grandeur to the performance; and the severe beauty of the choral singing is an integral part of this imaginatively planned performance.

"John Brown's Body" is a work of art, not only in print, but in the theatre. It tells the truth about some agonizing years that will always burden the soul of America.

Daily Mirror

February 16, 1953

'John Brown's Body' Is Rewarding Theatre

By ROBERT COLEMAN

In "John Brown's Body," Stephen Vincent Benét penned an epic poem about the Civil War. Starting with the fanatical Brown's abortive revolt to abolish slavery, Benét, through a number of characters, etched an amazingly comprehensive picture of that tragic conflict, its antecedents and results.

He wrote the poem because he had to—on a fellowship in Paris—with little thought in mind of financial reward. His compelling urge and personal courage paid off handsomely, for he returned to America to find his book a

Pulitzer Prize winner and a best seller. It was a truly magnificent drama for the library.

HAVING DEvised a new method for projecting G. B. Shaw's "Don Juan in Hell" last season, the versatile Charles Laughton applied the technique, with further innovations, to the presentation on stage of "John Brown's Body." In addition to having players in evening dress read the script, Laughton has added dancers and a chorus.

In "Don Juan," impresario Paul Gregory had Laughton, Charles Boyer, Cedric Hardwicke and Agnes Moorehead to speak the play. Now, he has Tyrone Power, Judith Anderson and Raymond Massey interpreting Benét's epic. With eloquence and remarkable dramatic impact, each recreates several characters, and emphasizes the philosophy inherent in the work.

Director Laughton has given the more powerful episodes to Power and Massey. There are those who think most film stars are not up to the technical demands of the theatre, but they forget that Power comes from a line of fine actors. His depiction of a soldier caught in the horrors at Gettysburg stirred the first-nighters at the Century Theatre to cheers.

HAVING SCORED perhaps his greatest triumph in Robert E. Sherwood's "Abe Lincoln in Illinois," Raymond Massey inevitably

ably was given the passages devoted to the harassed President's anxieties, hopes and eventual triumph. With forceful but beautifully controlled acting, he held the audience spellbound.

Miss Anderson is a dynamic actress. She can ring the rafters when she chooses, but last evening she drew her characters with admirable restraint and telling effect.

Richard White's chorus worked wonders with Walter Schumann's musical score and sound effects. The singers were reminiscent of a Greek chorus, abetting and highlighting the drama.

"John Brown's Body" has the virtue of improving as it progresses. It gains in stature and intensity until it reaches an emotional crescendo. It proves that outstanding players need only a handful of props, a few microphones, canny lighting and a masterly script to provide an evening of exciting and rewarding theatre.

your wife probably is—I can recommend "John Brown's Body" without reserve and with infinite enthusiasm. Here is a splendid recitation of a Pulitzer prize-winning complete history of the Civil War, in poetry, by the late Stephen Vincent Benét. There can be no better reciters than Tyrone Power, Raymond Massey and Judith Anderson, and they are aided by the best mixed chorus since the Hall Johnson choir made its magnificent contribution to "The Green Pastures."

Not Too Exciting.

If, on the other hand, you are looking for a nap and not for culture, I still can recommend "John Brown's Body." The Century Theatre's seats are quite comfortable

shows of the Chautauqua Circuit and the ladies' club bookings of such managers as Clark H. Getts.

If you are looking for culture with a capital K—and if you aren't

and the words of the poem are beautiful and soothing. Culture-bound though I am, it was only duty which kept me from doing through a large part of the artistically elaborate and physically uninteresting proceedings on Saturday evening.

Last year Gregory struck a Comstock Lode when he offered, without scenery, a recitation by Charles Laughton, Cedric Hardwicke, Charles Boyer and Agnes Moorehead of Shaw's "Don Juan in Hell," which is the leftover act from "The Devil's Disciple." Naturally interested in a business which required so little overhead (the show could blow one town and move to the next in four suitcases), Gregory has pursued it farther and has pro-

DAILY NEWS

February 16, 1953

'John Brown's Body'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Paul Gregory, of Oklahoma and California, is the newest and youngest of a long line of impresarios to discover that there are priceless pearls in culture. His "John Brown's Body," which was offered last Saturday evening at the Century Theatre, is a showmanlike descendant of such increments to American education as the lectures of Dickens and Wilde, the dedicated tent